

CLERK: Yes, sir.

SENATOR ASHFORD: Thank you. Mr. Speaker...

SENATOR WITHEM: Senator Ashford.

SENATOR ASHFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker and members, AM4351, a copy of which you should have at your desks, is the amendment that deals with the auditorium project in Omaha and the Henry Doorly Zoo parking project, and as you know, this matter has been before this body once before, last year at the end of the session, after a vote of the citizens of Omaha during the municipal elections in March of 1993, during which time the citizens voted for a one year one-half cent increase in sales tax to fund the renovation of the Omaha Civic Auditorium, and parking at the Henry Doorly Zoo. Let me, if I would, I am going to state two basic principles that motivate me on this debate, and in this particular initiative, and these two principles are this; one, as I look at the City of Omaha, from which I came, a city that I have lived in all my life, I have seen in the last 20 to 25 years, first of all, a significant downturn in the economic vitality of our downtown area, and then in the last couple of years, a rejuvenation or a restoration of downtown Omaha as a viable economic entity. I believe absolutely, sincerely, as many of you who are from the rural areas of the state also believe, that economic downturns in any area of a city or a state are crushing, not only economically, but also emotionally. So as I saw, as a resident of Omaha, in a sense, the undervaluation of the downtown area of the city, it became very...of great concern to me. When I was running for office in 1986, I made that one of my pledges, that I would work to try to rejuvenate economic activity, especially in the downtown area, because it is my absolute belief that any great city, first of all, has to have great people in it, and I think Omaha fills that bill, as does the State of Nebraska, but, secondarily, any great city must have a viable downtown in order to have a place where people can come together, to be together, and to be proud of. As we look at downtown Omaha, we are starting to get things down there that where people can be proud, but it's still an uphill battle for us. Also, it also happened during that same period of time was somewhat spot construction of new projects downtown in the seventies, and what some of those did was really block off sections of the city, like the north side of Omaha was blocked off from the downtown area by construction on the north side of the downtown area, and some of the construction of